

WESTTOWN FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
Westtown School, east side
Westtown
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6686
PA,15-WESTO,1-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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WESTTOWN FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

HABS No. PA-6686

- Location: Westtown School, east side, Westtown, Chester County, Pennsylvania.
- Significance: A rare architect-designed meeting house, the Westtown Friends Meeting House was constructed in 1929. Walter F. Price was the architect in charge; Price later designed the Florida Avenue Meeting House in Washington, D.C. (1931) and the Friends' meeting house in Montclair, New Jersey (1932). Price's contemporaries thought of his work as following the traditional way of building meeting houses, specifically including plans with rectangular footprints and interiors focused on the facing benches.¹ Price himself recognized the Quakers' "plain and simple attire" and suggested a parallel movement to that of Quaker clothing could be found in their architecture, beginning with the first meeting houses in England. In America, specifically in southeast Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey, Price admired the masonry construction, door hoods, and interior woodwork of the early, colonial-period meeting houses.² Price, as a matter of fact, used these features in the meeting houses he designed.³
- Description: The rectangular-shaped meeting house appears to be a one-story building that is visually divided into six bays by three bays; however, it is banked into the hillside. Its position in the landscape allows for a large, open basement. Typical windows are glazed with twelve-over-twelve lights arranged in double-hung sash; typical doors are double doors covered by pedimented hoods or by entry porches. A side-gable roof covers the building. Inside, the building is distinguished by entry vestibules, beaded wainscoting, and a sounding board above the two-tiered stand. There are also stairs leading down into the basement in the northeast and northwest corners of the building. The meeting room is said to measure 80' x 46' and to hold 500 people.⁴
- Historical Notes: The Westtown Indulged Meeting was established in 1799 so that the students of Westtown Boarding School would have a place to worship. Their meetings were held in the school, continuing even after the Indulged Meeting came under the care of the Westtown Monthly Meeting in 1920.

¹ D. Elton Trueblood, "Quaker Architecture," *The Friend* (Ninth Month 24, 1936): 118-119.

² Walter F. Price, "Old Meeting-houses," *The Friend* (Ninth Month 24, 1936): 115-118.

³ See, for example, Thomas Harvey Haines, "Friends Meeting at Montclair, NJ," *Friends Intelligencer* 97, no. 23 (Sixth Month 8, 1940): 363-364; Sina M. Stanton, "Friends Meeting of Washington, D.C.," *Friends Intelligencer* (Sixth Month 29, 1940): 413; and Jessie G. Carter, "Westtown Meeting House," *Friends Intelligencer* 97, no. 27 (Seventh Month 13, 1940): 445-446.

⁴ Carter, p. 445.

The Concord Quarterly Meeting established the Westtown Monthly Meeting, but the meeting house was realized through a gift of Arthur and Emma Foster Perry of New England. The first Monthly Meeting to convene in the meeting house took place in May of 1929. The meeting house is owned by the school, and not by the Trustees of the Monthly or Indulged Meetings.

Sources: Haines, Thomas Harvey. "Friends Meeting at Montclair, N.J." Friends Intelligencer 97, no. 23 (Sixth Month 8, 1940): 363-364.

Inventory of Church Archives: Society of Friends in Pennsylvania.
Friends' Historical Association for the WPA, November 1941.

Price, Walter. "Old Meeting-houses." The Friend (Ninth Month 24, 1936): 115-119.

Stanton, Sina M. "Friends Meeting of Washington, D.C." Friends Intelligencer 97 (Sixth Month 29, 1940): 413.

Historians: Catherine C. Lavoie and Aaron Wunsch, Friends' Meeting House Survey 1997-2001.